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Memorandum

(Not a CIA document)

Appraisal of NIE's

In my opinion the NIE's could be improved for purposes of policy making in several ways.

1. From reading them, one gets the impression that the estimators devote undue time and effort in trying to define precise probabilities which are thought to be nearly even. For policy purposes where the odds are so close, it would seem to me much more useful to indicate that both contingencies are within the range of those which should seriously be considered and prepared for in terms of policy.

2. On this same point, it seems to me that it would be useful in some cases where the possibilities are broader to set out a list of the several possible courses of development which are thought to be within the range of serious possibility even though not probable. For example, one might decide to list each eventuality which was thought to have a 25% chance of happening.

If the issue were posed in this way, the estimators might be more inclined to think about the range of possibilities without narrowing them down too closely. This might alert the policy makers to situations which are likely otherwise to be overlooked.

3. In reading

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3. In reading an estimate, one sometimes has the feeling that some statements are based on the analysis of factual data or the weighing of real evidence, and that others are essentially projections based on a general view of the individuals or groups involved but not supported by hard evidence. It seems to me that it might sometimes be useful to distinguish between these two types of estimates. Both are valuable but the policy maker may feel more inclined to make his own projections when they are derived merely from the general situation than he would where the statements are backed by concrete data which he has not examined.

4. More could be done I think to assess the extent to which U.S. action will influence the outcome or future events under analysis. This seems to me especially important in using the NIE's as tools for policy making. It would be extremely valuable to have an explicit estimate as to whether a particular situation

(a) is subject to very little influence
no matter what action we may take,

(b) will be substantially influenced by actions
or policies the U.S. adopts, or

(c) lies between these extremes.

In addition,

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In addition, it would obviously also be helpful to have more indications of which kinds of action by the U.S. are most likely to influence a situation which is subject to influence. Such analysis would help greatly in analyzing such matters as--

(a) What the real range of alternatives may be in terms of U.S. policies.

(b) Which factors should be treated virtually as given. and

(c) Which resources and efforts are most likely to be productive of results.

5. In general, the NIE's make hard reading even for an interested reader. In large measure this is doubtless inevitable where a writing is produced by a group. Perhaps more could be done, however, to retain a more forceful style. The summaries also tend to be so abstract or coreless as to make it hard to obtain their import.

6. Would there be room for a little more latitude in the format of the NIE's or some companion piece? Sometimes it would be stimulating to have a think-piece by an intelligent single author speculating
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on the course of events in some situation or area. This could be put in a different class than the coordinated NIE's and might be circulated without having to get the approval of other members of the intelligence community as to the text. Its circulation would merely mean that they felt it was of sufficient merit to be worth reading even though they might not agree with all of the estimate or the conclusions.